DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 262 CE 079 885

AUTHOR Tuckett, Alan; Cara, Sue
TITLE Tongue-Tied But Trying? A NIACE Survey on the Languages Adults Speak in Great Britain.
INSTITUTION National Inst. of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester (England).
SPONS AGENCY European Social Fund, Dublin (Ireland).
ISBN ISBN-1-86201-074-9
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 22p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GE, United Kingdom (5 British pounds). Web site: http://www.niace.org.uk.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Adults; Age Differences; Bilingualism; Blacks; Differences; Employment Patterns; Foreign Countries; *Individual Characteristics; Influences; *Language Attitudes; Language Dominance; Language Enrollment; Language Fluency; *Language Skills; Language Usage; *Literacy Education; Minority Groups; National Surveys; Native Speakers; Regional Characteristics; *Second Language Learning; Second Languages; Sex Differences; Socioeconomic Status; Tables (Data); Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Great Britain

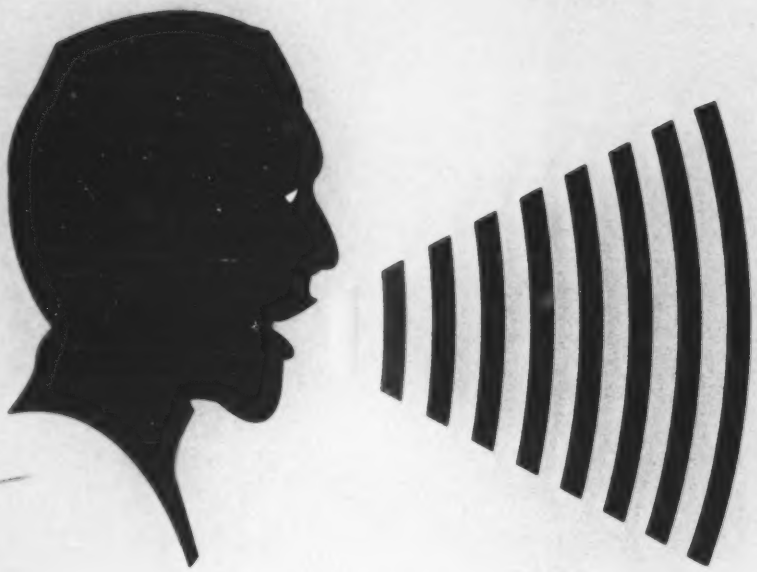
ABSTRACT

The language competence of adults in Great Britain was examined in a national study involving interviews between April 28 and May 9, 1999, with a representative sample of 3,967 adults over the age of 16 years. Of those surveyed, 58% spoke only their mother tongue, 29% spoke one additional language, and 10% spoke two additional languages. Fifteen percent of those surveyed were bilingual. Although 41% of those interviewed stated that they would like to learn an additional language, only 5% were currently learning a language. Younger people spoke more languages than older adults; 70% of respondents aged 16-19 years spoke more than one language. Fewer unemployed than employed people spoke additional languages. Social class was found to have a big impact on language learning: 65% of professional and managerial workers spoke more than one language, versus 49% of white collar workers, 34% of skilled manual workers, and 28% of the least-skilled individuals. Strong regional differences in the numbers of people speaking additional languages were identified. Only 10% of those whose first language was English spoke at least 2 other languages (versus 49% of people whose first language is a language other than English). Men and women tended to speak the same numbers of languages. (Contains 18 tables.) (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 439 262

Tongue-tied but trying?



A NIACE survey on the languages adults speak in Great Britain

Alan Tuckett and Sue Cara

P. Mokelman

2A

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Tongue-tied but trying?

A NIACE survey on the languages adults speak in Great Britain

Alan Tuckett and Sue Cara

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

Published by the National Institute of
Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales)

21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE
Company registration no. 2603322
Charity registration no. 1002775

© 1999 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
(England and Wales)

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without the written permission of the publishers, save in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

NIACE's website on the Internet is http://www.niace.org.uk

Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP record of this title is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 86201 074 9

Contents

Headline findings	5
Number of languages, by gender	7
Number of languages, by age and social class	8
Number of languages, by employment status	9
Number of languages, by region	10
Recent comparison – number of languages and current/recent learning	11
Number of languages, by mother tongue; bilingual ability	12
How many languages?	13
Future intentions, by gender	14
Future intentions, by age	15
Future intentions, by social class	16
Future intentions, by employment status	17
Future intentions, by region	18
Competence in French	19
Comparative competence	20

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the support of the European Social Fund in the preparation of this survey, and of Pauline Swanston in the design of the questionnaire, and as ever, our colleagues Helen Prew and Fiona Raybould.

For a sample size of 300 the sampling errors can be 3.5%, and can be higher for smaller bases. However, comparisons with the NIACE/RSGB survey on participation (*Marking Time: The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 1999*, Alan Tuckett and Naomi Sargant, ISBN 1 86201 072 2, £5.00), shows interestingly similar patterns.

Headline findings

NIACE commissioned a survey of adults' language competence to coincide with Adult Learners' Week 1999 and to contribute evidence to the Nuffield Enquiry into Languages. The fieldwork for the survey was carried out by RSGB (Research Surveys of Great Britain). A representative sample of 3,967 adults over 16 were interviewed in Great Britain between 28 April and 9 May 1999.

The survey showed that:

- Almost 6 in 10 adults speak only the language first learned
- Yet 15% of adults are bilingual
- 41% of adults would like to learn a language if time and circumstances permit
- Yet just 5% of adults are currently learning a language
- Younger people speak more languages than older adults
- Fewer unemployed people speak additional languages than people in work
- Social class has an impact on language learning: 65% of ABs speak one or more additional languages, 49% of C1s, 34% of C2s, and just 28% of DEs
- There are strong regional differences in the numbers of people speaking additional languages. Wales and Greater London have most adults speaking more than one language
- 49% of people with a first language other than English speak at least 2 other languages
- Just 10% of people whose first language is English speak at least 2 other languages
- Britain's black communities are a rich linguistic resource
- Men and women speak as many languages as each other
- 40% of people who learned German, 42% who learned French and 52% who learned Spanish can cope with a visit to the doctor in the language learned
- People surveyed would like to learn 60 different languages.

A fuller report will be prepared by NIACE later in the year.

Alan Tuckett
Sue Cara

May 1999

Number of languages, by gender

Tables 1-7 show the number of languages which respondents said they could use, understand, speak, communicate or have learned in the past.

- The survey shows that 58% of people only speak their mother tongue, 29% speak one other language, 10% speak 2 other languages
- Men and women speak the same number of languages as each other.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF LANGUAGES, by gender

	All	Men	Women
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,967	1,650	2,317
Only mother tongue	58	57	59
1 other language	29	29	29
2 other languages	10	10	10
3 other languages	2	3	2
4 other languages	1	1	*
5+ other languages	*	*	*

* represents less than 1 per cent in all the tables in this document

Number of languages, by age and social class

- 70% of 16-19-year-olds speak more than one language
- Younger people speak more languages than older adults.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF LANGUAGES, by age

	All	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,967	255	649	902	600	538	502	521
Only mother tongue	58	30	50	58	58	61	69	68
1 other language	29	49	31	29	28	27	23	23
2 other languages	10	18	14	9	11	9	6	6
3 other languages	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	2
4 other languages	1	0	*	*	1	*	1	1
5+ other languages	*	*	1	*	*	*	*	*

- Social class has an impact upon how many languages are learnt. 65% of professional and managerial workers (ABs), 49% of white-collar workers (C1s), 34% of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 28% of the least skilled (DEs) speak more than one language.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF LANGUAGES, by social class

	All	AB	C1	C2	DE
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,967	550	1,033	861	1,583
Only mother tongue	58	35	51	66	72
1 other language	29	42	33	26	20
2 other languages	10	16	12	7	6
3 other languages	2	4	3	1	2
4 other languages	1	1	1	0	*
5+ other languages	*	1	*	0	0

Number of languages, by employment status

- Fewer unemployed people speak additional languages than people in work
- There is no difference between full-time and part-time workers in the number of languages spoken.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF LANGUAGES, by employment status

	All	Full-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Not in paid employment	Retired
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,967	1, 388	586	185	667	931
Only mother tongue	59	55	55	61	69	66
1 other language	29	31	31	28	21	25
2 other languages	10	11	11	8	8	6
3 other languages	2	2	3	2	2	2
4 other languages	1	1	0	0	0	1
5+ other languages	*	*	1	1	0	*

Those in education are excluded from the table.

Number of languages, by region

- There are strong regional differences in the number of people speaking additional languages

- Wales and Greater London have the greatest number of adults speaking more than one language, whilst Scotland, the North and the West Midlands have the least. The same areas feature in top and bottom places in the recent NIACE survey on participation in adult learning (*Marking Time*, NIACE, 1999).

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF LANGUAGES, by region

	Base	No other language	2 or more languages
Scotland	360	69	31
North	257	63	37
West Midlands	393	63	37
East Midlands	303	60	40
South East	698	59	41
East Anglia	158	59	41
Yorkshire and Humberside	332	59	41
Great Britain	**3,967**	**58**	**42**
North West	420	58	42
South West	338	56	44
Greater London	496	49	51
Wales	212	48	52

Caution is needed over the findings relating to East Anglia, which are subject to a 2% error in either direction.

Regional comparison – number of languages and current/recent learning

TABLE 6: REGIONAL COMPARISONS, number of languages and current/recent learning					
Top for Languages			**Top for Adult Learning Participation**		
Wales	52%	2 or more languages	East Anglia	48%	current/recent
Greater London	51%	2 or more languages	East Midlands	48%	current/recent
South West	44%	2 or more languages	Greater London	46%	current/recent
North West	42%	2 or more languages	Wales	43%	current/recent
Bottom for Languages			**Bottom for Adult Learning Participation**		
East Midlands	40%	2 or more languages	South West	37%	current/recent
West Midlands	37%	2 or more languages	West Midlands	34%	current/recent
North	37%	2 or more languages	North	34%	current/recent
Scotland	31%	2 or more languages	Scotland	33%	current/recent

Source for Adult Learning Participation: *Marking Time* (NIACE) 1999

Number of languages, by mother tongue; bilingual ability

- 49% of people with a first language other than English speak at least 2 other languages, whilst only 10% of people whose first language is English do so
- 6% of people with a first language other than English speak only their mother tongue, compared with 62% of people whose first language is English.

TABLE 7: NUMBER OF LANGUAGES, by mother tongue

	English	Other
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,717	245
Only mother tongue	62	6
1 other language	28	45
2 other languages	8	33
3 other languages	2	13
4 other languages	*	2
5+ other languages	*	1

NB. Opinion survey sampling is likely to under-represent those who do not speak English.

- 15% of adults are bilingual
- More men than women are bilingual
- The proportion of young people who are bilingual is nearly double that of the population as a whole.

TABLE 8: ARE YOU BILINGUAL AT ALL, by gender

	Base	Yes	No
All	3,967	15	85
Men	1,650	17	83
Women	2,317	12	88
16-19	255	28	72

How many languages?

a) **Mother tongue**
Respondents to the survey were asked, 'What is your mother tongue? That is the language you first learned as a child.' Of 3,967 people asked, 3,717 had English as their mother tongue. There were, in the survey, 55 other mother tongue languages cited.

b) **Bilingual speakers**
Unsurprisingly, English featured overwhelmingly as one of the bilingual languages mentioned. 41 other languages were cited.

c) **Other languages used/understood/spoken/learned**
Respondents were asked 'Are there any other languages that you use or can understand, speak or communicate, or have learned at any time in the past?' – following on from questions about mother tongue, and bilingualism. 57 languages other than English were cited in reply.

d) **Languages currently being learned**
5% of respondents were currently learning any languages. They were learning 23 languages:

French
Spanish
German
Italian
English
Welsh
Greek
Arabic
Dutch
Sign Language
Japanese
Portuguese
Russian
Urdu
Anglo Saxon
Bulgarian
Cantonese
Chinese
Gaelic
Latin
New Testament Greek
Norwegian
Senegalese

e) **Future language learning**
Respondents were asked, 'Are there any languages you would like to learn if you had the time and opportunity?'

44% of respondents say they would like to study languages given time and opportunity. Once again French, German, Italian and Spanish are cited by the largest number of respondents, but respondents cited 60 languages in all, with a notable interest in Celtic languages among them.

f) **Cautionary note**
Opinion surveys cannot capture the full linguistic complexity of the largest conurbations. In its last survey of the mother tongue languages of children in its schools, the Inner London Education Authority noted 188 languages, many used by very small numbers of people. People who speak little or no English are also under-represented in surveys.

Future intentions, by gender

Are there languages you would like to learn, given time and opportunity?

Totals exceed 100% because some learners want to learn more than one new language.

- Whilst only 5% each of men and women are currently studying, more men would like to study languages, and a greater range of languages than women.

TABLE 9: FUTURE LANGUAGES, by gender			
	All	**Men**	**Women**
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,967	1,650	2,317
None	56	54	57
French	15	16	15
Spanish	12	12	12
German	9	11	7
Italian	7	6	7
Other	10	13	8
Don't know	3	3	2
	112%	115%	108%

Future intentions, by age

- French is the most popular language for all but the youngest
- Spanish is the language 16-19-year-olds most want to learn, and numbers wanting to learn Spanish drop with age
- German is of greatest interest to 40-59-year-olds
- Interest in Italian is strongest among younger people
- People aged 60+ are least likely to learn a language in the future.

TABLE 10: FUTURE LANGUAGES, by age

	All	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Base – all respondents = 100%	3,697	255	649	902	600	538	502	521
None	56	40	44	47	50	56	71	80
French	15	9	18	22	18	17	10	7
Spanish	12	24	15	14	13	11	9	3
German	9	8	9	10	14	11	5	5
Italian	7	14	11	7	7	5	4	2
Other	10	12	15	11	10	10	7	6
Don't know	3	5	4	3	2	2	2	1
	112%	112%	116%	114%	114%	112%	108%	104%

Future intentions, by social class

- French is the most popular language for all but social class AB, who would most like to learn Spanish
- Those in social class AB expressed most interest in learning German, Italian and other languages in the future
- People in social class DE are least likely to learn a language.

TABLE 11: FUTURE LANGUAGES, by social class

	All	AB	C1	C2	DE
Base	3,697	550	1,033	861	1,583
None	56	48	51	56	64
French	15	16	19	14	12
Spanish	12	17	13	12	8
German	9	12	8	11	7
Italian	7	10	8	5	4
Other	10	15	14	8	7
Don't know	3	1	2	2	4
	112%	119%	115%	108%	106%

Future intentions, by employment status

- People in full-time education are most likely to learn a language in the future
- The people least likely to learn a language in the future are the retired.

TABLE 12: FUTURE LANGUAGES, by employment status				
	Base – all respondents = 100%	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**
Full-time	1,388	52	46	2
Part-time	586	40	51	4
Unemployed	185	42	54	4
Not in paid employment	667	40	56	4
Retired	931	23	76	1
All	3.967	41	56	3

Those in education are excluded from the table.

Future intentions, by region

- Wales does best in languages spoken and future intentions
- Greater London and the South West score highly on languages spoken, but poorly on future intentions
- Almost twice as many people want to learn a language in Wales as in the South West.

TABLE 13: FUTURE LANGUAGES, by region

	Base – all respondents = 100%	Yes	No	Don't know
Wales	212	59	38	3
North West	420	47	48	5
North	257	44	51	5
East Midlands	303	42	56	2
South East	698	41	57	2
West Midlands	393	41	57	2
Greater London	496	37	51	2
Scotland	360	36	63	1
East Anglia	158	35	61	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	332	34	65	1
South West	338	32	65	3

Competence in French

More than 1,000 people suggested they could speak, understand or communicate in French, or had learned it in school. Of those, 829 said they were not bilingual. The survey explored their language competence.

TABLE 14: COMPETENCE IN FRENCH			
	Yes	**No**	**Don't know**
Understanding			
Can you make sense of simple directions?	84	14	2
Can you make sense of the news on television?	30	65	4
Can you understand more or less anything that is said to you?	29	69	2
Speaking			
When speaking in French can you join in a friendly informal conversation?	18	80	2
Can you ask to buy something?	80	18	2
Can you cope with a visit to the doctor?	42	55	3
Reading			
Can you understand everything that you read?	12	87	1
Can you make sense of common signs?	84	13	3
Can you make sense of articles in newspapers?	45	52	3
Writing			
Can you write a list of words?	78	21	1
Can you string together a simple sentence?	80	19	1
Can you write about more or less anything?	12	88	*

Comparative competence

TABLE 15: MAKING SENSE OF THE NEWS ON TELEVISION				
	Base	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**
French	829	30	65	4
German	331	37	60	4
Spanish	170	44	53	3

TABLE 16: COPING WITH A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR				
	Base	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**
French	829	42	55	3
German	331	40	57	2
Spanish	170	52	45	2

TABLE 17: MAKING SENSE OF ARTICLES IN THE NEWSPAPERS				
	Base	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**
French	829	45	52	3
German	331	41	55	4
Spanish	170	55	43	2

TABLE 18: WRITING A SIMPLE SENTENCE				
	Base	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**
French	829	80	19	1
German	331	71	27	2
Spanish	170	74	25	1

Tongue-tied but trying?

A NIACE survey on the languages adults speak in Great Britain

Alan Tuckett and Sue Cara

Tongue-tied but trying presents the headline findings of a survey carried out by NIACE between 28 April and 9 May 1999. Nearly 4,000 adults were interviewed to gain a picture of adults' language competence in Great Britain.

The results show that regional and social class factors are strong determinants of language competence, as are age and employment status. About two-fifths of those surveyed said they would like to learn another language, citing 60 different languages.

Price £5.00 (UK, inc p&p)

ISBN 1 86201 074 9 22